

109TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. RES. 500

Expressing the sense of Congress that the Russian Federation should fully protect the freedoms of all religious communities without distinction, whether registered or unregistered, as stipulated by the Russian Constitution and international standards.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 6, 2006

Mr. BROWNBACK (for himself, Mr. BIDEN, Mr. SMITH, Mr. NELSON of Florida, Mr. VITTER, Mr. SANTORUM, Mr. DEMINT, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. ALLARD, Mr. TALENT, Mr. COBURN, Mr. LEAHY, Mr. NELSON of Nebraska, Mr. INHOFE, Mrs. DOLE, Mr. MARTINEZ, Mr. ALLEN, Mr. COCHRAN, and Mr. CHAMBLISS) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

JULY 14, 2006

Committee discharged; considered and agreed to

RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of Congress that the Russian Federation should fully protect the freedoms of all religious communities without distinction, whether registered or unregistered, as stipulated by the Russian Constitution and international standards.

Whereas the Russian Federation is a participating State of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and has freely committed to fully respect the

rights of individuals, whether alone or in community with others, to profess and practice religion or belief;

Whereas the 1989 Vienna Concluding Document calls on OSCE participating States to “take effective measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination against individuals or communities on the grounds of religion or belief” and to “grant upon their request to communities of believers, practicing or prepared to practice their faith within the constitutional framework of their States, recognition of the status provided for them in the respective countries”;

Whereas Article 28 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation declares that “everyone shall be guaranteed the right to freedom of conscience, to freedom of religious worship, including the right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion” and Article 8 of the 1997 Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations provides for registration for religious communities as “religious organizations,” if they have at least 10 members and have operated within the Russian Federation with legal status for at least 15 years;

Whereas religious freedom has advanced significantly for the vast majority of people in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union;

Whereas many rights and privileges afforded to religious communities in the Russian Federation remain contingent on the ability of the communities to obtain government registration;

Whereas some religious groups have not attempted to register with government authorities due to theological considerations, and other communities have been unjustly denied

registration or had their registration improperly terminated by local authorities;

Whereas many of the unregistered communities in the Russian Federation today were never registered under the Soviet system because they refused to collaborate with that government's anti-religious policies and they are now experiencing renewed discrimination and repression by authorities of the Russian Federation;

Whereas over the past 2 years there have been an estimated 10 arson attacks on unregistered Protestant churches, with little or no effective response by law enforcement officials to bring the perpetrators to justice;

Whereas the Government of the Russian Federation reacted swiftly in response to the January 2006 attack on a Moscow synagogue, but there have been numerous other anti-Semitic attacks against Jews and Jewish institutions in the Russian Federation, and there is increasing tolerance of anti-Semitism in certain segments of society in that country;

Whereas there has been evidence of an increase in the frequency and severity of oppressive actions by security forces and federal and local officials against some Muslim communities and their members;

Whereas there are many cases involving restitution for religious property seized by the Soviet regime that remain unresolved;

Whereas in some areas of the Russian Federation law enforcement personnel have carried out acts of harassment and oppression against members of religious communities peacefully practicing their faith and local officials have

put overly burdensome restrictions on the ability of some religious communities to engage in religious activity; and

Whereas the United States has sought to protect the fundamental and inalienable right of individuals to profess and practice their faith, alone or in community with others, according to the dictates of their conscience, and in accordance with international agreements committing nations to respect individual freedom of thought, conscience, and belief: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That it is the sense of Congress that the
2 United States Government should—

3 (1) urge the Government of the Russian Fed-
4 eration to ensure full protection of freedoms for all
5 religious communities without distinction, whether
6 registered or unregistered, and end the harassment
7 of unregistered religious groups by the security ap-
8 paratus and other government agencies, thereby
9 building upon the progress made over the past 15
10 years in promoting religious freedom in the Russian
11 Federation;

12 (2) urge the Government of the Russian Fed-
13 eration to ensure that law enforcement officials vig-
14 orously investigate and prosecute acts of violence,
15 arson, and desecration perpetrated against reg-
16 istered and unregistered religious communities, as
17 well as make certain that government authorities are
18 not complicit in such incidents;

1 (3) continue to raise concerns with the Govern-
2 ment of the Russian Federation over violations of re-
3 ligious freedom, including those against unregistered
4 religious communities, especially indigenous denomi-
5 nations not well known in the United States;

6 (4) ensure that United States Embassy officials
7 engage local officials throughout the Russian Fed-
8 eration, especially when violations of freedom of reli-
9 gion occur, and undertake outreach activities to edu-
10 cate local officials about the rights of unregistered
11 religious communities;

12 (5) urge the Government of the Russian Fed-
13 eration to invite the three Personal Representatives
14 of the OSCE Chair-in-Office and the United Nations
15 Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief
16 to visit the Russian Federation and discuss with fed-
17 eral and local officials concerns about the religious
18 freedom of both registered and unregistered religious
19 communities; and

20 (6) urge the Council of Europe, its member
21 countries, and the other members of the G-8 to
22 raise issues relating to religious freedom with Rus-
23 sian officials in the context of the Russian Federa-

- 1 tion's responsibilities both as President of the Coun-
- 2 cil in 2006 and as a member of the G-8.

